Opportunity Culture Implementation:
Early Lessons from the Field

By Public Impact

Summary of Lessons

Lesson 1: Address Necessary State and District Policy Barriers. Districts and states must identify and address Opportunity Culture (OC) policy barriers before the design process begins, and review annually at midyear in preparation for the next year.

Lesson 2: Establish District Support for Schools' OC Implementation. District leaders must provide timely technical assistance, tools, decision-making power, and transitional support for small, temporary financial shortfalls for school models within Opportunity Culture Principles.

Lesson 3: Support Strong School Leadership for OC Implementation. Principals need training and support to lead a team of teacher-leaders and other teachers who extend their reach, and they need paid career advancement options that let them remain directly responsible for student outcomes.

OPPORTUNITY CULTURE PRINCIPLES

Teams of teachers and school leaders must choose and tailor models to:

1. **Reach more students with excellent teachers and their teams**
2. **Pay teachers more for extending their reach**
3. **Fund pay within regular budgets**
4. **Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development**
5. **Match authority and accountability to each person's responsibilities**

Lesson 4: Build and Support Effective Design Teams. Form district and school design teams with clear goals, roles, and decision-making power, staffed with individuals committed to OC Principles; top district leaders must maintain direction and support to implement and scale up the Opportunity Culture designs.

Lesson 5: Create Complete School Design Plans. School designs should include long-term and next-year detail about roles, financial sustainability, technology, schedules, and how teachers will work together.

Lesson 6: Clarify MCL Roles and Build Teaching Team Leadership. Multi-classroom leaders (MCLs)—essential in schools that want to reach all or nearly all students with excellent teachers—need clear roles, advance training, ongoing coaching in leadership and management skills, and protected time to plan and lead.

Lesson 7: **Build Schedules that Let Teams Collaborate.** Schedule and protect additional in-school time for OC teachers to plan, alone and as a team; review student work; and improve together during the school year.

Lesson 8: Hire Early and Be Selective. Recruit early, advertise widely using multiple methods, make links to Opportunity Culture job openings obvious on the district's website, and use the materials on OpportunityCulture.org to recruit and be selective among candidates.

Lesson 9: Give Everyone the Right Data to Improve. Interim and annual data should be collected and reported to match OC roles, to help teachers improve during the school year and help principals lead well; consistent interim assessments would help OC teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Opportunity Culture (OC) models offer a full plan for putting excellent teachers in charge of all students' learning, for more pay, and providing all teachers with frequent, on-the-job support and development. This brief shares the lessons that Public Impact and our partners have learned from our work with schools in the early stages of OC implementation. Education First and Education Resource Strategies also helped to facilitate early implementation efforts, as did district staff members assigned to lead change from within each district.

We are using these lessons to improve our free implementation tools and materials on OpportunityCulture.org, along with the service that Public Impact, our partners, district change-management staff, and independent technical assistance providers offer to guide district leaders and schools. Our goal is to help teachers improve outcomes dramatically for all students, and we do this by helping schools extend the reach of excellent teachers and teams to more students, for more pay, within their budgets.

This work requires dramatic change by schools and districts: empowering excellent teachers to increase their impact, directly and by leading teams. Dramatic change requires dedication, courage, and persistence, and we have learned important lessons working with this trailblazing set of schools and districts.

During the 2013–14 and 2014–15 school years, Public Impact and our partners worked with five sites, helping school and district teams design and implement OC models. We began in 2013–14 in Charlotte's Project L.I.F.T., a high-need zone of schools within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and Metropolitan Nashville Schools in Tennessee. In 2014–15, they were joined by many more Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, Syracuse City Schools in New York, and Cabarrus County Schools in North Carolina. (Other districts have joined since then and are in preliminary planning stages.)

Five Opportunity Culture Principles, as shown in the box on page 1, set the guideposts for school and district design teams' decisions.

All the sites engage in design and planning activities in the year before implementing new teaching models. During this design year, Public Impact and its partners provide districts and schools with a wide range of printed materials and in-person guidance. In most cases, we also share our expertise with the design teams in four to five on-site meetings. District and school design teams are responsible for formulating design and implementation plans for their chosen OC models. In some cases, sites contract with Public Impact to conduct training for teachers in OC roles the summer before implementation and to conduct site visits during the fall and spring of the first and second year of implementation to monitor progress and offer feedback.

OPPORTUNITY CULTURE IMPLEMENTATION SITES THROUGH 2014–15

Site	Number of Schools Implementing OC in 2014-15
Cabarrus County Schools, NC	7
Project L.I.F.T., NC	5
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC	15
Syracuse City Schools, NY	4
Metropolitan Nashville Schools, Innovation Zone, TN	4

The online Opportunity Culture Dashboard posts school design, student, and teacher outcomes. Among those outcomes:

- More than 150 teachers held advanced roles and more than 300 other teachers were developed on the job by OC teacher-leaders.
- Teachers typically reached 33 percent to 300 percent more students than average.
- More than 16,000 students were reached using Opportunity Culture models by the second year.
- More than 70 percent of these students were in STEM classrooms.
- Districts launching recruitment by March in the first two years received applications at a rate of about 30:1 applications per open position. Those starting recruitment later in the year had between 4:1 and 10:1 applications per position.
- Teacher pay supplements for advanced roles ranged from $3,500 to $23,000 and averaged approximately $10,000.
- All sites but one paid these supplements completely within regular budgets by reallocating funding, with no grant funds or line-item pay; all are within regular budgets for 2015–16.
- Average weekly planning minutes ranged from approximately 225–450.
- Of the first three schools that implemented Opportunity Culture models schoolwide in the first year:
    - Two had high growth in both reading and math in the first year.
    - The third school had high growth in reading and math by its second year (subject to state verification).
- In schools transitioning gradually to new models over two to three years, significantly more students in OC classrooms made high growth in the second year than in non-OC classrooms in the same and similar schools—by March 2015, 42 percent to 70 percent more made high growth, depending on the comparison group. Fifty percent more students in *non*-OC classrooms made *low* growth. All were very high-poverty schools. (Annualized data not yet available for OC classroom comparison.)
- A significant majority of teachers agreed with a wide range of positive statements about the Opportunity Cultures in their schools in an anonymous survey.

These outcomes are promising, particularly because the pilot schools with reported student outcomes were very high-poverty schools. However, some pioneering districts, schools, and teachers achieved better, faster results than others. Strengths and challenges varied across sites. Learning from these differences fast is crucial to improved outcomes as more schools and districts create their own Opportunity Cultures.

This document catalogues the challenges and solutions that Public Impact and our partners saw in early implementation sites. Their experiences highlighted the importance of timely policy changes; a strong design process; stable and committed district, school, and team leadership; school schedules; early recruitment; and proactive data collection.

In each section, we summarize the nine overarching lessons, offer our solutions for assistance providers, schools, and districts, and give examples of actions that Public Impact, our partners, and some schools and districts have taken.

METHODOLOGY

To evaluate successes and challenges, we collected data and feedback from OC schools and districts, including teachers, principals, and district administrators. After each coaching and design session, implementation teams from Public Impact or its partners solicited feedback in the form of exit slips. We conducted interviews with OC staff and administrators at the school and district level. Implementation teams scheduled regular calls and made site visits eight to 10 times a year, during which we collected feedback and recorded our observations. Schools received memos with detailed site-based recommendations, which they used in their coaching. Additional data were collected for the OC dashboard, which contains indicators of successful OC implementation, including teacher and staff perception surveys.

EARLY LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

1. Address Necessary State and District Policy Changes

The Challenge: OC models extend the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students, for more pay, within recurring budgets. State and district policy barriers can limit successful implementation of any of these elements.

State policies such as simplistic restrictions on class size, which do not take into account paraprofessional-supervised portions of blended learning, or limitations on pay budget flexibility that reduce teacher supplements can make it difficult to fully implement OC. For example, if a North Carolina school wants to trade a non-classroom specialist or regular teaching position for dollars to pay teachers more for leading or contributing to Opportunity Culture teams, it must trade in such a position for the *starting* pay for that position. So it might trade in a position that gets paid $46,000, the average teachers' pay, for the starting pay for that position in the low to mid-$30,000s. That limits a district's ability to scale up, and reduces the benefit to teachers, and thus students. The damage is greatest in the poorest districts, which do not have locally funded positions that can be traded in for higher-paid roles.

District policies, such as those affecting hiring and placement of teachers, have also been barriers. For example, districts that do not identify until late spring which teachers intend to remain in a school, and that do not allow schools to post open positions until that point, force schools to make staffing decisions far too late. This leaves school leadership teams unable to staff their schools optimally and compete for the best talent in recruitment and hiring, which appears to have far better results when recruitment launches by March.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***Districts and states must identify and address policy barriers before the design process begins, and review annually midyear in preparation for the next year.***

State and district policy barriers must be reviewed and addressed early in the design and implementation process, then reviewed each year in order to ensure that systems are improved and prepared for another level of scale. State and district leaders must exert leadership to change policies quickly, or else accept the diminished potential impact on teacher recruitment, retention, and reach, and the consequential negative impact on student learning outcomes.

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Complete a comprehensive review of state and district policies before working with districts and states, and work with leaders to address these barriers before the design process begins with districts and schools
    - *Example: Public Impact created a database of ideal policies and analyzed each early-implementing site's policies for changes needed urgently and for scaling up. Advocacy organizations and legislators are responsible for ensuring execution of state policy changes, and district leaders are responsible for making district policy changes.*

Schools Should:

- Inform district leaders and technical assistance providers in writing about all district policies that prevent the school from implementing OC models successfully, describing the problem and a suggested alternative policy
- Be vocal about the impact on teachers and their students when policy changes are delayed

Districts Should:

- Review state and district policies affecting hiring, staff roles and budget use. Use Public Impact's *Seizing Opportunity at the Top II*
- Anticipate policy barriers to reaching students with excellent teaching; change them in advance
- Remove policy barriers promptly when informed by schools of negative impact
- Shift from making exceptions to changing policies for all schools when scaling up into more than a few schools
- Advocate, with teachers, for removing state policy barriers to reaching students with excellent teaching
- Conduct initial and annual assessments of compensation, career path design, financial sustainability, teacher evaluation fit and tools, and other policies affecting school staffing, budgets, technology, and facilities

2. Establish District Support for Schools' OC Implementation

The Challenge: A lack of district support, or slow district decision-making, can undermine even the most dedicated school-based efforts. Schools' implementation suffered when they did not receive enough design technical assistance, good tools, and necessary flexibility. When they did not get these from the district, schools were hampered in design and early implementation, including: reallocating positions, providing stipends for OC positions, using teacher evaluation and accountability matched to OC roles, giving teachers more time for planning and collaboration (addressed as its own issue elsewhere in this report), and recruiting for OC positions. Further, districts that slowed expansion of OC models to additional schools districtwide provided fewer in-district career opportunities to emerging teacher-leaders in pilot schools. In survey responses, teachers themselves highlighted three primary areas that require more district action and support: matching evaluations to OC role responsibilities, increasing planning time, and building confidence that enhanced pay for OC roles is sustainable. Principals and school design teams requested better recruitment support, flexibility to hire early, and power to staff schools according to the plans made by school design teams without position-by-position approval. Implementation teams agreed that many of the early challenges could be mitigated by stronger district leadership and decision-making. Additionally, a district can help with small financial shortfalls by establishing a fund to cover small, temporary overages during transition years, as long as each overage is small and the staffing plans are financially sustainable by the third year of implementation.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***District leaders must provide timely technical assistance, tools, decision-making power, and transitional support for small, temporary financial shortfalls for school models within Opportunity Culture Principles.***

District leaders—including the superintendent, heads of human resources and budget offices, and OC initiative leadership—must support schools' redesign efforts.

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Secure backing from district leadership, and ensure that district leaders understand and fully support OC design and implementation
    - *Example: Public Impact and partners developed a district readiness tool to identify actions and planning required at the district level. Technical assistance providers created relationships with an "OC champion" in each district to improve the design and implementation process. These champions were essential in driving important districtwide processes and changes.*

- Help districts overcome perceived barriers to OC
    - *Example: Technical assistance providers coached districts in methods to overcome perceived barriers to creating OC reach positions at schools.*
    - *Example: Public Impact is publishing a dashboard of OC designs, student outcomes, and teacher perceptions; seeing the early, positive results and improvements needed can help everyone in a district get on board for change.*
- Ensure that one person in the district is accountable for OC implementation goals and success, and work closely with that person and his or her team to achieve goals for reach, student outcomes, and teacher satisfaction

Schools Should:

- Establish regular communication or meetings with the district regarding OC implementation
- Share the impact of slow district decisions or lack of support on recruitment, retention, and student success

Districts Should:

- Designate an OC coordinator or "champion" at the district level who is empowered to make necessary changes to enable implementation and who is accountable for implementation success
- Listen to and encourage internal champions for OC within the central office and schools
- Set multiyear goals for the percentage of students reached by excellent teachers
- Publish the percentage of students districtwide reached by an excellent teacher in each subject, as well as student outcomes and teacher perceptions
- Explore the idea of a sustainability "pool" at the district level, so schools help one another achieve sustainable plans when transitioning gradually, as long as each overage is small and staffing plans are financially sustainable by the third year of implementation

3. Support Strong School Leadership for OC Implementation

The Challenge: OC models provide new roles that are challenging and rewarding, but require new skills and capacities from both teachers *and* school leaders. School leaders report a number of advantages to using OC models, including their ability to lead a team of leaders rather than supervising dozens of individual teachers. Yet, principals have not held reach roles themselves, and in most cases do not have experience leading a team of leaders who then lead instruction. Interviews revealed that school leaders need development and support.

Through exit slips and interviews, teachers reported that without a strong leader supporting the OC implementation, school design teams often fail to understand their place in implementation plans and struggle to commit to the OC model. In addition, many of the strongest school leaders in early OC schools were recruited by other districts or promoted away from direct responsibility for students after achieving positive student outcomes.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***Principals need training and support to lead a team of teacher-leaders and other teachers who extend their reach, and they need paid career advancement options that let them remain directly responsible for student outcomes.***

Strong engagement from school leaders is essential, including being a champion and supporter, getting schedules right, supporting multi-classroom leaders (MCLs), and providing time and resources to OC teams and teachers. Clarity around roles, implementation details, and reporting structures supports the success of the new models, but also creates continuity if school leaders change midyear. MCLs can carry a school through leadership transitions, but they will be best equipped to do this if they have been led as a team of teacher-leaders to ensure schoolwide success.

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Improve role clarity for school leaders via coaching and training. School leaders need clarity about the new roles for teachers and leaders required for OC implementation
    - *Example: Public Impact has developed, or is currently developing, tools and training materials to:*
        - Conduct training sessions on the changing role and new career paths for teacher-leaders prior to the start of the school year, with MCLs and leaders required to attend
        - Help principals develop skills and capacities necessary to lead a teams of empowered teacher-leaders
        - Clearly communicate roles to all teachers and staff within the school, especially non-OC instructional facilitators, so that school leaders can be sure the whole school team is working together
- Increase understanding of OC model and roles across school teams
    - *Example: Technical assistance providers coached school leaders on the importance of explaining OC roles, models, and reporting structures to teams. Public Impact introduced an organization chart tool as an aid.*
- Improve channels of communication between school leaders and MCLs
    - *Example: Some schools used structured check-in protocols for MCLs with school leaders. One very successful school used weekly "instructional rounds" to give the school leader and the team of MCLs ongoing opportunities to discuss practice and share expertise. Public Impact is adding tools for principals who are leading a team of teacher-leaders to help in these communications.*
- Design paid career paths for principals. Public Impact is undertaking additional work to provide examples of paid career paths that let great leaders expand their impact without leaving direct school leadership.

Schools Should:

- Include time in schedules for MCLs to meet with one another and schoolwide leaders each week
- Establish clear lines of communication and regular meeting agendas for school leaders and OC teams
- Seek training from the district for schoolwide leaders to lead a team of teacher-leaders

Districts Should:

- Provide professional development and training to help school leaders lead teams of teacher-leaders
- Add paid career advancement opportunities for school leaders that keep them in schools

4. Build and Support Effective Design Teams

The Challenge: Schools and districts must make many decisions and get buy-in from many stakeholders in the design year before implementing OC models. This posed challenges for some districts and schools, especially when beginning the design process later than desired.

In the design year, districts must select pilot schools, form a district-level design or organizing team, set design parameters, such as pay levels and goals for the percentage of students to be reached by excellent teachers, and change district policies to give schools budget, staffing, and other flexibilities. The cohesiveness and commitment of district organizers varied. Some locations had stable, committed district teams. In these locations, communications and decisions continually improved. In others, district staff members were assigned the initiative without commitment, roles were unclear, and turnover at many levels occurred, which diverted the time of organizers in schools, the district, and partnering organizations away from critical activities.

In that same planning year, schools must build design teams that include teachers. These teams choose models, plan for staffing and budget reallocation, and map out the changes required to implement new OC staffing models. In our work with early implementation sites, Public Impact and partners participated in four to five on-site meetings with most school teams, and provided communication advice and design detail support. The level of direct support to schools and district staff differed *substantially* by district, based on the external transition funding available and resources allocated by the district to supporting school and district design.

In some districts, communications among schools, district staff, and technical assistance providers were open and frequent, and in others limited and infrequent.

Feedback from teacher interviews highlighted challenges that occurred when design teams did not include key staff or did not complete and communicate implementation plans early enough for sites to address hiring, scheduling, and policy changes necessary for implementation. Consistency is important, too—implementation teams reported challenges in facilitating the design process in schools where the design teams were not stable groups of teachers but instead "whoever was available to meet that day." The same is true of district-level design: Districts that formed teams of people who were committed to the work, with clear roles, and with clear goals set by the superintendent were able to focus their time on design decisions. Districts without those conditions wasted large amounts of staff time and technical assistance provider time, and failed to make some basic policy decisions that affected schools—including the freedoms schools had to change staffing and the scale-up pace and steps. The result: fewer advanced opportunities for teachers, fewer students reached, and a lot of frustration by school staff.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***Form district and school design teams with clear goals, roles, and decision-making power, staffed with individuals committed to OC Principles; top district leaders must maintain direction and support to implement and scale up the Opportunity Culture designs.***

Clarity of goals and roles and commitment to the objectives of OC work are essential, as is good teamwork among all the parties organizing the change process. Consistency of leadership commitment and decision-making is essential to scaling up within schools and across the district.

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Start the design process early—fall or early winter of the design year
    - *Example: Public Impact published a toolkit in spring 2015 that includes timelines, checklists, and tools to guide districts and schools planning for implementation. One element of the toolkit is guidance for district and school leaders on selecting members of the design teams to ensure that the right mix of people become involved.*
- Use project management tools to clarify steps, roles, and timing for district-level decision-makers
    - *Example: This seems basic, but during the early pilot phase it is easy to work more informally through basic checklists for district decisions. Public Impact found that increasingly sophisticated planning tools and check-in routines were essential when growing the number of schools in a district beyond the first handful—when district-level decision-making speed and quality affects thousands of students—and also during leadership turnover.*

- Create high engagement at school design sessions
    - *Example: The school design process requires a stable group of committed teachers who have protected time to meet. Early implementation sites that ensured that the school design teams could meet regularly through the design process produced stronger implementation plans.*
    - *Example: Early design participants provided feedback that the session materials, while comprehensive, could be overwhelming. In response, Public Impact revised and reduced the materials for school design steps to critical, engaging activities.*
    - *Example: Early site design teams reported that monthly (rather than more frequent) meetings were manageable, given busy school schedules, but also were frequent enough to allow learning and planning to progress. When the design process is started early enough in the school year, design teams have time to use the right "pace" for the design process.*
- Use strong, clear districtwide and schoolwide communication to support OC implementation
    - *Example: While design teams are critical for making decisions, they must communicate with the wider school and district community. Public Impact increasingly facilitated schoolwide communication and, to include the larger school community in the design process, developed communications planning tools available to implementing sites. Public Impact also continually revised and modified consulting materials to ensure that design team members understand the OC models as they move through the design process.*

Schools Should:

- Clarify the critical role of a stable design team and communicate the details schoolwide. Integrate design team and the larger school community in the process
- Inform district leaders in writing about all district policies that prevent the school from reaching students with excellent teachers, describing the problem and a suggested proposed alternative policy

Districts Should: See Steps for Technical Assistance Providers above, and …

- Establish a district design team of committed individuals with clear goals for scaling up, clear roles, and a clear process for making district policy decisions in a timely manner
- Anticipate policy barriers to reaching students with excellent teaching; change them in advance
- Remove unanticipated policy barriers promptly when informed by schools of negative impact
- Advocate for changes to state policy barriers to reaching students with excellent teaching
- Ensure that schools have technical support to make plans with clear goals and detailed steps

5. Create Complete School Design Plans

The Challenge: Early design teams addressed scheduling and staffing challenges and led the way in moving the OC models from theory to reality. Exit slips from those first meetings, however, revealed that teams were overwhelmed by information and materials, and uncertain how to prioritize actions and decisions. When completed, early design plans did not address critical details or contingency plans to ensure longevity and sustainability in the event of inevitable school and staff changes. In addition, design teams did not always look beyond the first year of implementation and lay out planning steps for the next school year, especially when rolling out models incrementally over a few years. When schools did plan in advance, it became clear that some transition years were almost but not quite financially sustainable, even though the final model would be, leading to suboptimal interim staffing decisions. Challenges were greater when implementing a Multi-Classroom Leadership model incrementally, as some schools did not clarify which students, subjects, and grades should be covered by the remaining instructional specialists/facilitators, nor were they clear on what role they should play, if any, in classes covered by an MCL.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***School designs should include long-term and next-year detail about roles, financial sustainability, technology, schedules, and how teachers will work together.***

The Public Impact team will continue simplifying the free design materials on OpportunityCulture.org. Districts and other technical assistance providers should provide school teams with materials in bite-size chunks with only the critical decisions at each step, so teams can make progress toward new school models without becoming overwhelmed. As more schools implement OC models, rather than a proliferation of designs, we already see a narrowing and focusing on the ones that work well for teachers. Over time, this should further reduce the work of school design teams, which will be able to focus on the design elements truly unique to each school—staff roles, scheduling, instructional team work processes, technology, etc.—and on producing sustainable plans each year.

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Ensure coherence and longevity of design plans
    - *Example: Public impact and partners increasingly used design sessions to work with design teams to create financially sustainable long-term plans. Public Impact also revised materials for design teams to include schoolwide, three-year designs, not just the next year.*
- Use simple tools for teams to clarify roles, work processes, and technology in detail
    - *Example: Public Impact had added or is adding simple planning tools for school teams to:*
        - Identify technology needs for the coming year
        - Clarify how MCLs will work with their teams, how direct-reach teachers without an MCL will collaborate, and how MCLs will work with the school's instructional leader to monitor and improve during the year
        - Work with MCLs to organize roles of remaining facilitators and non-classroom specialists for the next year
        - Communicate clearly with MCLs, instructional facilitators, and other affected teaching staff, so they know what changes are coming
- Identify and address perceived and real barriers to creation of OC reach positions
    - *Example: Public Impact and partners offered coaching to help teams find ways to overcome perceived barriers, such as uncertainty about options for swapping positions and how wide the spans of teacher-leaders could go without reducing outcomes. We also facilitated communication with districts about actual policy barriers to extending reach effectively—such as the ability to recruit in the spring for a position anticipated to be open the following year.*
- Follow the basics of strong organization design. Public Impact and partners increasingly recommended plans that included sound organizational effectiveness basics.
    - *Example: We recommended that, whever possible, design plans have MCLs leading teams of teachers with a common goal—such as a common subject, or a grade-level team—so teachers can learn from one another, and MCLs can manage a cohesive team. In addition, Public Impact is developing an annual school plan review process to highlight ideal design, such as:*
        - MCLs helping good teachers leap to great, rather than leading only the lowest-performing teachers
        - MCLs managing teachers for whole years to be accountable for development, rather than partial years
        - MCLs continuing routinely to teach students directly part-time, rather than no longer teaching (no longer teaching was rare, however)

Schools Should:

- Determine detailed implementation steps for the next school year by early spring if possible
- Get help from experts to understand how to optimize roles and implement them schoolwide
- Document design decisions, so future school and district leaders understand school models
- Create clear contingency plans for midyear turnover in OC teachers and school leaders

Districts Should:

- Review school implementation plans and provide feedback and support

6. Clarify MCL Roles and Build Teaching Team Leadership

The Challenge: Multi-classroom leaders are essential in any school that wants to reach all or nearly all students with excellent teachers in charge of learning. Direct-reach roles without MCLs, even if spread throughout a school, will reach less than 40 percent of students in an average school. Yet MCLs rarely have formal leadership experience, and typically do not yet have the management tools or skills to organize and lead a team. Exit slips and interviews revealed that many of the earliest MCLs lacked awareness of their primary function and key responsibilities within a team, and they struggled initially to secure the support of their team members. Teams reacted in negative ways when they did not understand the MCL role and how it would affect them; the absence of a clear reporting structure also caused confusion. Schools and districts often lacked the capacity to deliver ongoing training to MCLs, and there was a general lack of understanding in the early implementation efforts about the important role MCLs can play in developing other teachers to higher levels of effectiveness. MCL turnover midyear, though uncommon, negatively affected teams when it occurred. Some MCLs reported that required district meetings that were only tangentially related to school success sapped their time.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***Multi-classroom leaders—essential in schools that want to reach all or nearly all students with excellent teachers—need clear roles, advance training, ongoing coaching in leadership and management skills, and protected time to plan and lead.***

Schools and districts can do much to support the success of multi-classroom leaders, and, indirectly, the success of the teachers they lead. Emerging resources and tools for districts, school leaders, and MCLs themselves should make this role—which appears critical to whole-school success among early implementers—increasingly successful.

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Ensure clarity of MCL and instructional leader roles
    - *Example: Public Impact and partners recommended role clarity training prior to the start of the school year, with MCLs and leaders required to attend, along with periodic retraining throughout the year. To assist with this, Public Impact developed an organization chart to clarify everyone's roles.*
- Coach MCLs on critical leadership and management skills
    - *Example: Technical assistance providers can now use the free, online MCL training materials, which Public Impact wrote and, with partners and experienced MCLs, delivered and honed during the second implementation year. Additional planning tools will be added in the future. The training modules address ways to communicate new roles to teams effectively and focus on key tasks that drive results, including:*

    - Goal-setting
    - Leading, coaching, and organizing a team
    - Time and task management
    - Clarity on day-to-day, job-embedded professional development
- Facilitate improved communication between school leaders and MCLs as a "team of leaders"
    - *Example: Implementers with the best, fastest schoolwide student results had the principal or assistant principal lead multi-classroom leaders across the school as a team of leaders, sharing interim outcomes and problem-solving together—weekly or, in some cases, more often.*

Schools Should:

- Cover as much of the school as quickly as possible with multi-classroom leaders, without stretching spans too far for each MCL to develop and lead his/her team well
- Communicate implementation plans with clear descriptions of new roles to the entire school community
- Schedule regular meetings of school leaders and MCLs to review student interim outcomes and teacher development, and to make improvements rapidly
- Provide training for all new OC roles, most urgently those charged with leading other teachers
- Protect, and advocate for the district to protect, MCL time for leading their teams and teaching

Districts Should:

- Develop clear contingency plans for MCL and leader departures, putting policies in place prior to OC implementation
- Encourage schools to add MCLs across their schools faster, as talent is available, to develop a larger pipeline of leaders, removing any staffing or budget policy barriers that stand in the way
- Reallocate professional development dollars and time to advance training and ongoing coaching for multi-classroom leaders and other OC roles
- Halt required meetings of school and team leaders related to old initiatives, and allow them to focus on achieving instructional excellence using their new school models; reduce administrative tasks

7. Build Schedules that Let Teams Collaborate

The Challenge: OC models require significant changes to standard school schedules. MCLs and reach-extension teams must have time to plan for teaching more students in a variety of groupings and to review more student assignments. Teacher interviews revealed that early sites grappled with how to ensure that reach teams have time to collaborate, co-teach, and give feedback, and to give MCLs time to meet with the school's instructional leader. Through interviews and the 2015 school culture survey, teachers also reported that scheduling conflicts and interruptions in class hindered effective teaching. Schools implementing gradually over two to three years often did not provide enough planning and co-scheduled collaboration time for reach teachers and teams, which affected extended-reach teachers' ability to extend their reach effectively.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***Schedule and protect additional in-school time for OC teachers to plan, alone and as a team; review student work; and improve together during the school year.***

Schools can boost the success of OC models by building sufficient time into the school day for MCLs and reach teams to engage in teamwork and carry out their new roles effectively. Both schools and districts can make this time "real" by protecting it from incursion by other duties and meetings.

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Help schools build schedules that protect time for reach teams
  - *Example: Public Impact and partners increasingly advised schools to build schedules that:*
    - Give reach-extending teachers time to plan for larger numbers of students and to review more students' work
    - Include enough collaboration time for initial instructional planning (content, methods, and differentiated instruction); monitoring interim outcomes; and discussing and changing approaches to improve content, methods, and differentiated instruction
    - Provide time for:
      - MCLs to meet with the school's instructional leader (in most cases, the principal or assistant principal)
      - MCLs to meet with their teams
      - Direct-reach teachers teaching the same subjects or grades to meet with one another
      - All to plan and review student work independently
    - Include several consolidated hours of planning every week. Most elementary teams should be able to create *a two-period block* daily for grade teams, and secondary teachers should have *six or more extra hours* a week of planning, co-scheduled with subject peers so they may meet as a team as often as necessary.
- Encourage ongoing schedule maintenance
  - *Example: Public Impact and its partners increasingly recommended that school administrators work with MCLs and extended-reach teachers to prioritize and organize workloads to make the best use of every teacher's time.*

Schools Should:

- Protect OC staff time from other meetings, especially purely administrative meetings and ones from old initiatives of professional development that have been replaced by on-the-job development
- Develop a structured format for ongoing schedule maintenance for everyone on the team to monitor and adjust their schedules
- Work with MCLs and other reach teachers to prioritize and reduce workloads (minimizing redundant or irrelevant meetings)

Districts Should:

- Provide significant scheduling assistance, through district staff or technical assistance providers, recognizing that teachers' time is one of a school's most precious assets
- Avoid required meetings for teacher-leaders and administrators related to old initiatives and professional development methods that are largely replaced by the OC models

8. Hire Early and Be Selective

The Challenge: One early sign of success in the OC initiative came in how many OC job applications high-poverty schools received—schools that previously could not fill all of their positions. Although all sites were able to fill all positions selectively, some sites had more applicants and could be even more selective. The most successful sites recruited early and widely. Other districts with less successful recruitment efforts only recruited internally, posted openings in locations other than their main employment webpage, did not provide webinars or other outreach, and/or began recruiting after March.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***Recruit early, advertise widely using multiple methods, make links to Opportunity Culture job openings obvious on the district's website, and use the materials on OpportunityCulture.org to recruit and be selective among candidates.***

New guidance, tools, and videos on OpportunityCulture.org to help with recruitment and selection should make future efforts easier for districts.

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Help districts develop strategic hiring approaches to increase the quality and size of applicant pool and selectivity
    - *Example, Public Impact created a selection toolkit and recruitment tools to aid districts and schools in hiring for OC positions; recommended more formalized rigor in the selection process, using free selection tools, with focus on evidence of effectiveness; recommended that districts screen applicants to create a pool from which principals can hire in each district; and encouraged districts to plan ahead to ensure that they have enough trained staff available to manage screening**.***
- Help districts recruit early to ensure wide selection
    - *Example: Teacher recruitment data suggest that districts posting job descriptions of OC roles by March have more applicants and more high-quality applicants, with as many as 30 applicants per OC position in some cases; Public Impact and partners have made this a major part of our in-person technical assistance.*

Schools Should:

- Nurture teachers showing early evidence of exceptional teaching and/or leadership for future roles
- Actively encourage teachers with evidence of high student growth to apply for open positions, and those with emerging leadership potential to apply for MCL positions specifically
- Hire teachers for advanced roles to progress rapidly toward the goal of 100 percent of students reached by excellent teachers
- Support district recruitment efforts
- Participate actively in selection to choose people who will round out the school team and support a culture of excellence
- Use free recruitment and selection materials on OpportunityCulture.org

Districts Should:

- Use free recruitment and selection materials on OpportunityCulture.org
- Begin recruiting in March or earlier for best-quality candidates and the most selection
- If necessary, move the staff "declaration of intent to leave" date earlier in the school year to permit timely announcement of vacant positions
- Advertise positions widely and through many channels, such as job fairs and webinars, but also including the most obvious: Post open positions on the main district recruiting page
- Ask teachers, staff, and schoolwide leaders to share job openings with friends and acquaintances who they think would make great candidates

- Use the recruiting video provided by Public Impact, and post open positions on the OpportunityCulture.org job opening pages, so that teachers specifically interested in OC roles know about openings
- Plan for the evaluation and exit process to allow time for replacements, when needed

9. Give Everyone the Right Data to Improve

The Challenge: A data-driven approach gives teachers the feedback they need to tailor and improve instruction, gives team leaders information to coach and develop teachers, gives school leaders information about the success of new OC roles and staff, and gives districts data on schoolwide success. But implementation teams found that schools and districts, even when they collected data, were not providing feedback reports aligned with OC roles. Teams and school leaders did not have team-level and extended-reach data to make rapid decisions about what students and their teachers needed to improve during the school year. Inadequate use of students' interim growth data prevented some schools from plotting the growth needed for students to achieve learning goals.

A lack of consistent measures to assess teachers across teams, grade levels, and sites also made it difficult to document successes and challenges of OC models. Technical assistance providers must make data requests many months in advance to collect data to aid implementation efforts, and even then data may not be sorted by OC roles—team-level data for MCLs, for example, is typically not available. Lack of consistency of interim data within and across schools also hampers meaningful comparisons and the opportunity to learn from them. Finally, many schools and districts have not collected the data necessary to calculate the percentage of students reached by excellent teachers each year, even though they have set reach goals for their schools, making it impossible to track this measure with precision.

The Lesson and Next Steps:

Lesson: ***Interim and annual data should be collected and reported to match OC roles, to help teachers improve during the school year and help principals lead well; consistent interim assessments would help OC teachers.***

Technical Assistance Providers and District Change Leaders Should:

- Regularly evaluate implementation and outcomes, and encourage interim data use by schools
  - *Example: Public Impact launched an online interactive Opportunity Culture Dashboard that compiles key metrics across sites, and built tools for gathering data and calculating percentages of students reached. Districts providing data can receive private reports showing how their schools compare to others nationally. Public Impact is creating free training materials for MCLs to use students' interim data more effectively at the team level.*
- Streamline data collection processes
  - *Example: Technical assistance providers can build relationships with district data staff to facilitate data collection and include data-sharing agreements within consulting contracts to avoid filing lengthy data requests. Sharing with Public Impact will allow schools and districts to see how they compare to other OC sites nationally.*

Schools Should:

- Calculate and track the percentage of students reached by excellent teachers in each subject, both those in OC roles and other excellent teachers in the same schools

- Provide teachers with materials, training, and support to review interim student results in order to improve and adjust instruction, individually and at the team level

Districts Should:

- Consider adoption of district-wide interim assessment and reporting
- Provide data that match OC roles, such as team-level data for multi-classroom leaders and their principals, and similarly matched data for extended-reach teachers such as elementary subject specialists
- Calculate and track the district-wide percentage of students reached by an excellent teacher

CONCLUSION

While early results of Opportunity Culture implementation show great promise, students and teachers will benefit even more from Opportunity Culture if schools, districts, and technical assistance providers continually improve implementation in response to the lessons we've learned so far. Schools pursuing an Opportunity Culture have committed to an ambitious set of changes. Challenges putting those changes into action are inevitable. Public Impact is committed to helping teachers, school leaders, district leaders, and other technical assistance providers tackle those challenges creatively, spreading excellent teaching to more students and outstanding career opportunities to more teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contributors to this report include Public Impact's Lyria Boast, Elaine Hargrave, Bryan C. Hassel, Emily Ayscue Hassel, Lucy Steiner, Mindy Schlegel, Stacey Shumake, Nita Losoponkul, and Angie Spong; the teams from our partner organizations that work with Opportunity Culture districts and schools; and the teachers and administrators designing and implementing new school models. We are very grateful to pioneering teachers, principals, and their districts for their courage and commitment to reaching all students with excellent teaching.

Thank you to Public Impact's Sharon Kebschull Barrett for copyediting and Beverley Tyndall for production.

This brief was made possible by support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of Public Impact. For more information about the Opportunity Culture initiative and other funders, visit *OpportunityCulture.org*.

© 2015 Public Impact, Chapel Hill, NC

Public Impact's mission is to dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on students who are not served well. We are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. We are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, and on-the-ground consultants who work with leading education reformers. For more on Public Impact, please visit www.publicimpact.com.

Public Impact encourages the free use, reproduction, and distribution of this paper for noncommercial use. **We require attribution for all use.** Users must include "©2015 Public Impact" on all pages where material from this document appears. Opportunity Culture is a trademark of Public Impact.

Please cite this report as: Public Impact. (2015). *Opportunity Culture implementation: Early lessons from the field.* Chapel Hill, NC: Author. Retrieved from http://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Opportunity_Culture_Implementation_Early_Lessons_from_the_Field-Public_Impact.pdf